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A Department of the City and County of San Francisco

San Francisco Emergency Ride Home Program

2015-16 Annual Report

CommuteSmart

January 2017



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Emergency Ride Home (ERH) program furthers San Francisco's Transit First Policy, encouraging commuters to use sustainable commute modes by providing a way to respond to emergencies. The program helps the City meet its goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

The San Francisco Department of the Environment administers the ERH program for all San Francisco employees.

Analysis of the Emergency Ride Home program for the 2015-16 fiscal year identified several positive conclusions and some areas for improvement in coming years.

1. **Cost-effective program.** Overall, ERH is an efficient program generally considered to be a strong motivator to walk, bike, take transit, or rideshare to work instead of driving alone.
2. **Infrequent use by participants.** Most employees who use the program only utilize ERH once per fiscal year, indicating that the program is likely only being used in emergency situations and therefore not being abused.
3. **Supports and encourages use of sustainable commute modes.** Having this program in place has encouraged many commuters to try sustainable transportation when they would not have otherwise, since they are provided with a "safety net" that allows them to travel home quickly and safely in cases of unforeseen emergencies. The program supports more consistent, frequent, and cost-effective usage of these modes.
4. **Increases confidence in sustainable transportation.** When participants were asked if they would continue to walk, bike, take transit or rideshare if the ERH program were discontinued, many said they would continue their use of sustainable transportation with the same frequency. This displays the effectiveness of the ERH program in helping participants realize the benefits of sustainable transportation and to feel confident in using those modes even with the absence of the safety net.

Although Emergency Ride Home has been a successful program for encouraging and incentivizing sustainable modes of transportation among commuters, aspects of the program can be improved for the future.

1. **Commuter Outreach.** Increased program visibility is necessary to enhance awareness and usage of ERH services. Some commuters are still unaware of the program's existence or the circumstances when they are allowed to use the program. ERH was formerly heavily

marketed to businesses, as employers had to opt-in to the program. Recent changes allow any San Francisco employee to utilize the program, so while the program is still promoted to businesses, the outreach could be expanded to employees to gain a wider base of participants. Ideally no employee would need to use the program, but emergencies do happen, so it is important for all San Francisco employees to be aware of this valuable resource.

2. **Streamlined Processes.** Improvements have been made since the program's inception to make program administration more efficient, but further enhancements could be achieved. A certain amount of work is required to process reimbursement requests, collect and analyze data, and promote the ERH program, but improvements could be made to decrease staff time, process reimbursements more quickly, and most efficiently reach a wide audience. Examples include further automation of survey analysis and increased cross-promotion with other City programs. CommuteSmart, utilizing their regular processes of reporting and program evaluation, will continue to identify and seize these opportunities to boost efficiency.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Emergency Ride Home provides a safety net for San Francisco commuters using sustainable transportation, such as walking, biking, taking transit or ridesharing.

When San Francisco employees use a sustainable mode to travel to work and experience a personal or family emergency while at work, they can take a taxi, shared taxi, public transit vehicle, or Transportation Network Company (TNC) vehicle and the Department of the Environment will reimburse the cost of the ride.

1.1 BENEFITS TO BUSINESSES AND SAN FRANCISCO

Emergency Ride Home is a free program open to all San Francisco employees. For businesses, the program supports the commuter benefits program, and can help to reduce employee off-street parking demand. Additionally, walking, biking, taking transit or ridesharing to work promotes employee health.

ERH also supports San Francisco's policies and goals. In 1973, the San Francisco City Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors adopted the Transit First Policy to prioritize investment for walking, biking and transit.¹ ERH also helps meet citywide climate goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

1.2 PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The San Francisco Department of the Environment's CommuteSmart program staff administer and promote the Emergency Ride Home program. Funding is provided by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's County Manager Transportation Fund for Clean Air and the San Francisco County Transportation Authority through Proposition K.

The ERH program is free and available to all permanent part-time or full-time employees of a San Francisco employer. Before 2014, employers had to register for the program. However, due to a change in policy registration is no longer required. Any San Francisco employee is eligible to request reimbursement for emergency rides, regardless of their employer.

Participants must have taken one of the following commute modes to work on the day they use ERH:

- Walking
- Biking
- Public transportation (bus, train, ferry)

¹ Transit First Policy, San Francisco City Charter, Section 8A. 115. <https://www.sfmta.com/transit-first-policy> (Accessed December 2016).

- Carpool/Vanpool

Employees may request reimbursements for the following qualified emergencies:

- Illness or crisis of employee or immediate family member
- Carpool or vanpool ride is unavailable due to unexpected changes in the driver's schedule or vehicle breakdown
- Bicycle problem, including flat tire, mechanical failure, vandalism, or theft
- Required unexpected overtime (i.e., employee was not aware of the situation before the start of the workday). Supervisor authorization is required for this reason and the trip must take place after 10 p.m. when public transit is less available.

The Emergency Ride Home program will reimburse one-way taxi fare and/or public transit fare only. These reimbursements are made with the following restrictions in place:

- Participants may be reimbursed for up to four trips per fiscal year, and each trip is reimbursable up to \$150.
- Employers are limited to a total reimbursement cap of \$1,000 per fiscal year. After this limit is reached, the program will reimburse employers for 50 percent of the cost of each valid trip up to an additional \$1,000 maximum each fiscal year. Employers may opt to reimburse the remaining 50 percent if they choose.
- All trips must originate at the participant's work location in San Francisco

Participants will be reimbursed for the costs that meet these restrictions. Trips not covered include personal errands, non-emergency related side-trips on the way home, medical emergencies that require an ambulance, transit service breakdown or interruption, natural disasters or civic emergencies, transportation to a doctor or hospital resulting from an on-the-job injury (ERH cannot be used to replace an employer's legal responsibility under workers' compensation regulations), and trips before 10 p.m. by regular transit riders who have unscheduled overtime.

When employees are taking an emergency ride home, they must keep the original receipts from their trip(s). To request a reimbursement, participants must complete an online reimbursement form which includes a brief questionnaire regarding their commuting behaviors and their use of ERH (Appendices A and B). The online form is dynamic, so depending upon the answers provided the participant may be prompted to print and complete a Supervisor Approval form (Appendix C). This approval form, which includes the supervisor's signature, needs to be submitted to the San Francisco Department of the Environment along with the employee's receipt(s). Reimbursements are processed within four to six weeks. The full set of program rules are provided in Appendix D.

2. EMERGENCY RIDE HOME PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

2.1 REIMBURSEMENT ANALYSIS

As seen in Table 1, the total cost reimbursed for the ERH Program in FY 2015-2016 was \$1,705.08. More than 76 percent of the reimbursements were submitted by San Francisco business employees while the rest were requested by City and County of San Francisco (CCSF) employees.

Table 1. Costs and Number of Reimbursements FY 2015-2016

Employer	Total Reimbursement Costs	Number of Reimbursements
SF Businesses	\$1244.69	33
City and County of San Francisco (CCSF)	\$460.39	10
Total	\$1705.08	43
Average Cost per Reimbursement	\$39.65	

Total reimbursement costs increased in the 15-16 fiscal year (Figure 1). The new amount slightly eclipses the costs in the 13-14 fiscal year, following a lower amount in fiscal year 14-15.

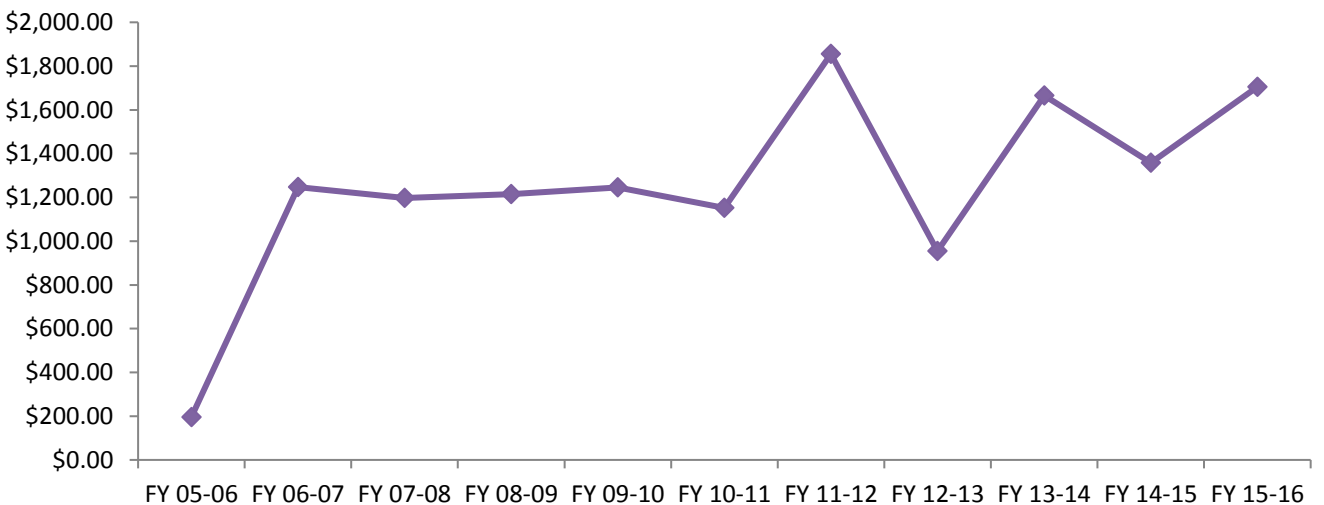


Figure 1. Total Reimbursement Amount by Fiscal Year

n = 339

Figure 2 shows the average cost of reimbursements. Total reimbursement costs have fluctuated throughout the years. However, during the 2015-2016 fiscal year the average cost of reimbursements reached its highest mark ever, increasing from \$30.18 in FY 14-15 to \$39.65 in FY 15-16. The average cost of reimbursement and the number of reimbursements increased slightly this past year, perhaps due to longer trips and/or higher fares. However, since there is only a small

number of reimbursements each year, average and total costs often vary from year to year and may not be representative of any larger trends.

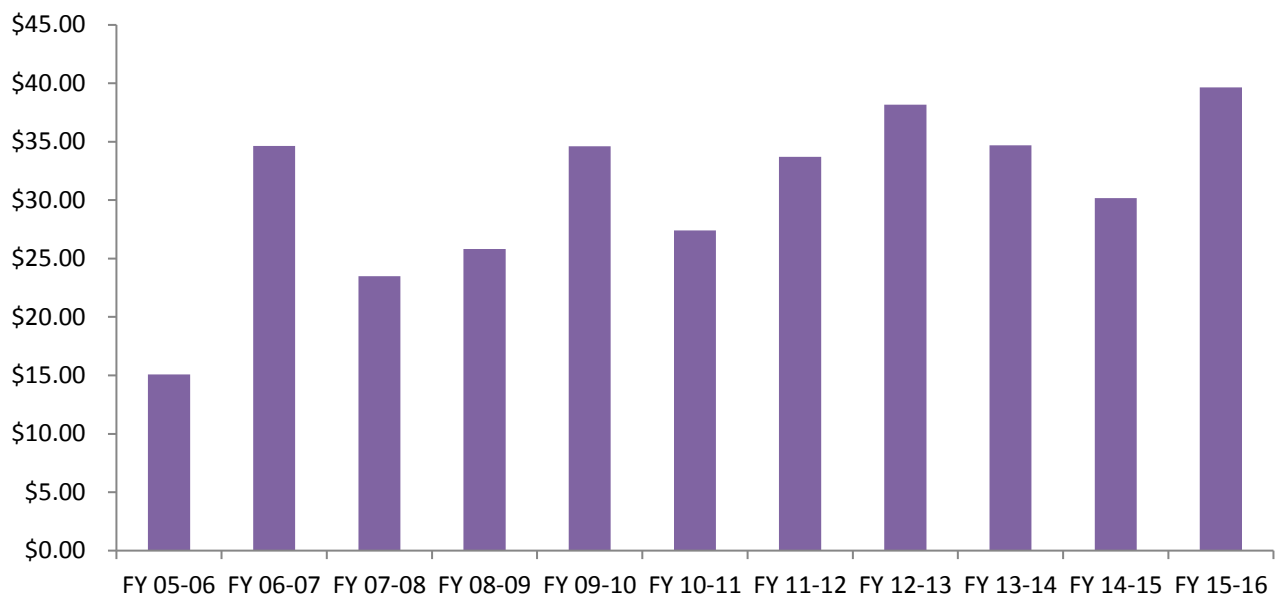


Figure 2. Average Reimbursement Amount by Fiscal Year

n = 339

2.2 USAGE TRENDS

The past fiscal year saw an increase in the number of reimbursements submitted. However, as seen in Figure 3, most users only used ERH once. This suggests that participants use the program only in a necessary manner. The number of times participants have used this service two or more times in a fiscal year has remained low throughout the years since this program has been in place.

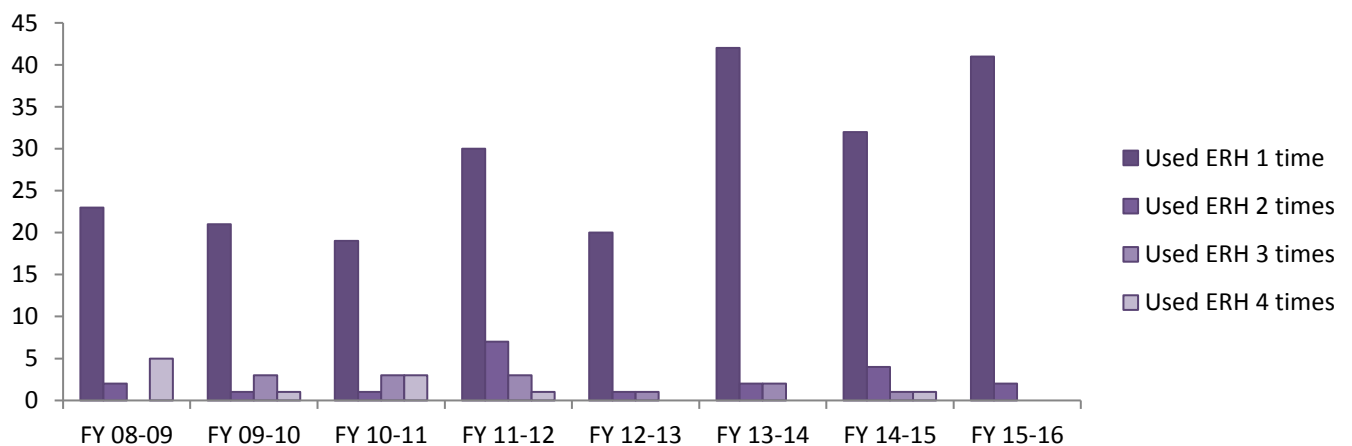


Figure 3. Usage per Participant

n = 339

Most people utilize ERH due to unscheduled overtime, but there are also many reimbursement requests indicating personal or family member illness/crisis (Figure 4). Very few people reported using ERH for bicycle or carpool/vanpool problems, which may indicate an opportunity for increased outreach to ensure employees know they can utilize ERH under those circumstances. More likely though, this is due to lower utilization of those transportation modes.

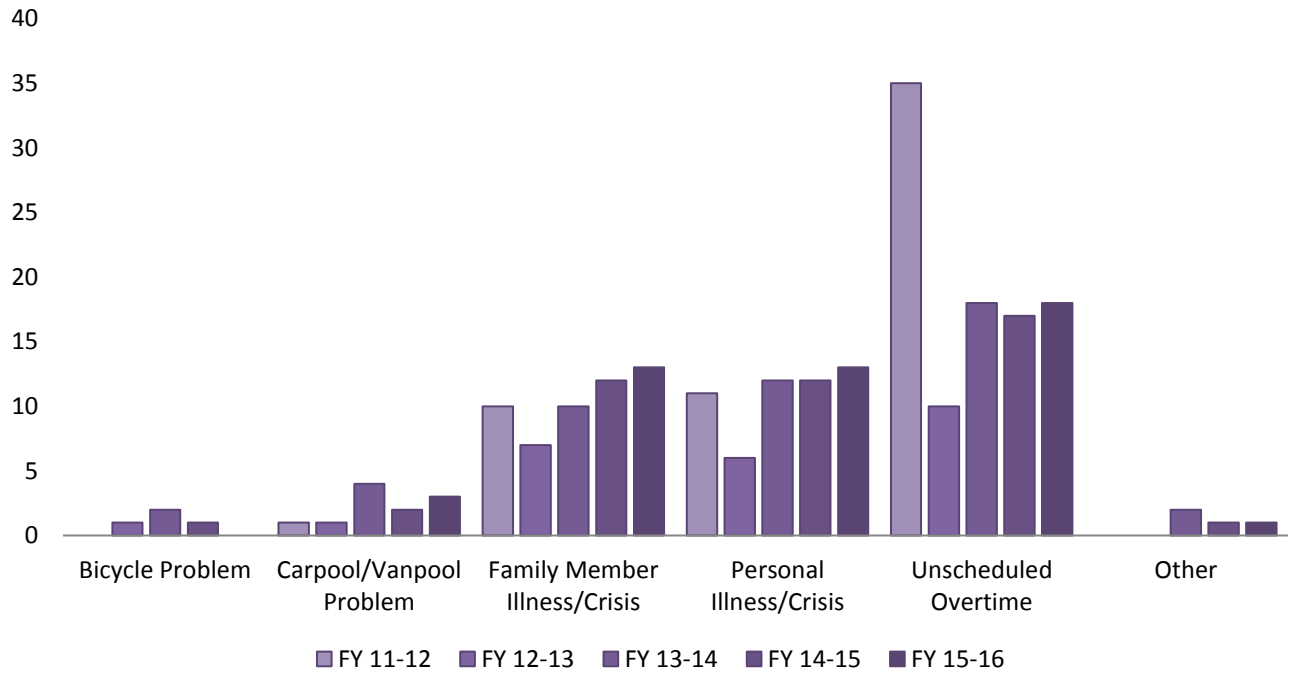


Figure 4. Reasons for Using ERH

n = 348

3. RESULTS OF THE EMERGENCY RIDE HOME SURVEY

The ERH participant questionnaire, which is part of the reimbursement request form, helps CommuteSmart to understand how the program shapes participants' decisions to use sustainable commute modes.

From FY 2005 to FY 2012, many participants indicated that they had used a sustainable mode for their commute prior to joining ERH (Figure 5). However, during FY 2012 to 2015 the majority of participants did not use a sustainable commute mode prior to using ERH. This may indicate that the program is becoming more effective in changing commuting behavior and encouraging employees to drive less to work. FY 15-16 somewhat reverted to the old trend, but still almost half of participants had not previously used sustainable commute modes.

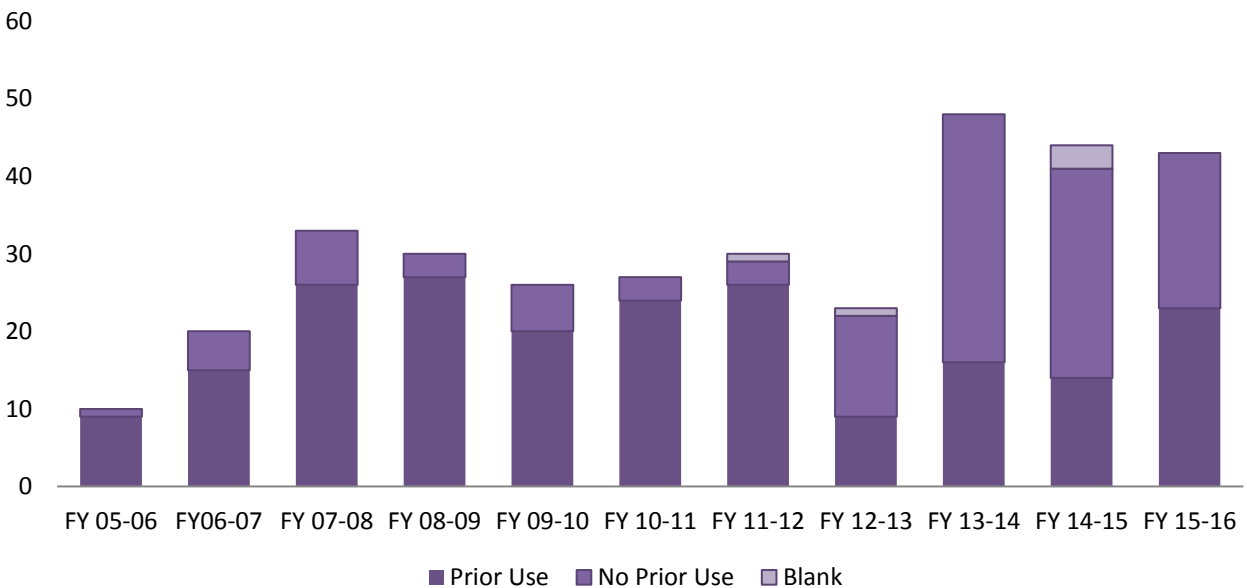


Figure 5. Use of Sustainable Commute Modes Prior to Joining ERH Program

n = 291

Those participants who indicated that they did not use a sustainable mode for their commute prior to learning about the ERH program were asked how important the program was in changing their commute mode (Figure 6). During FY 2015-16, 29% of respondents said ERH was either *important* or *very important* in their decision to switch to sustainable modes of transportation. This was the highest percentage to date, and is encouraging news given the barriers and environmental benefits surrounding a shift to more sustainable forms of transportation.

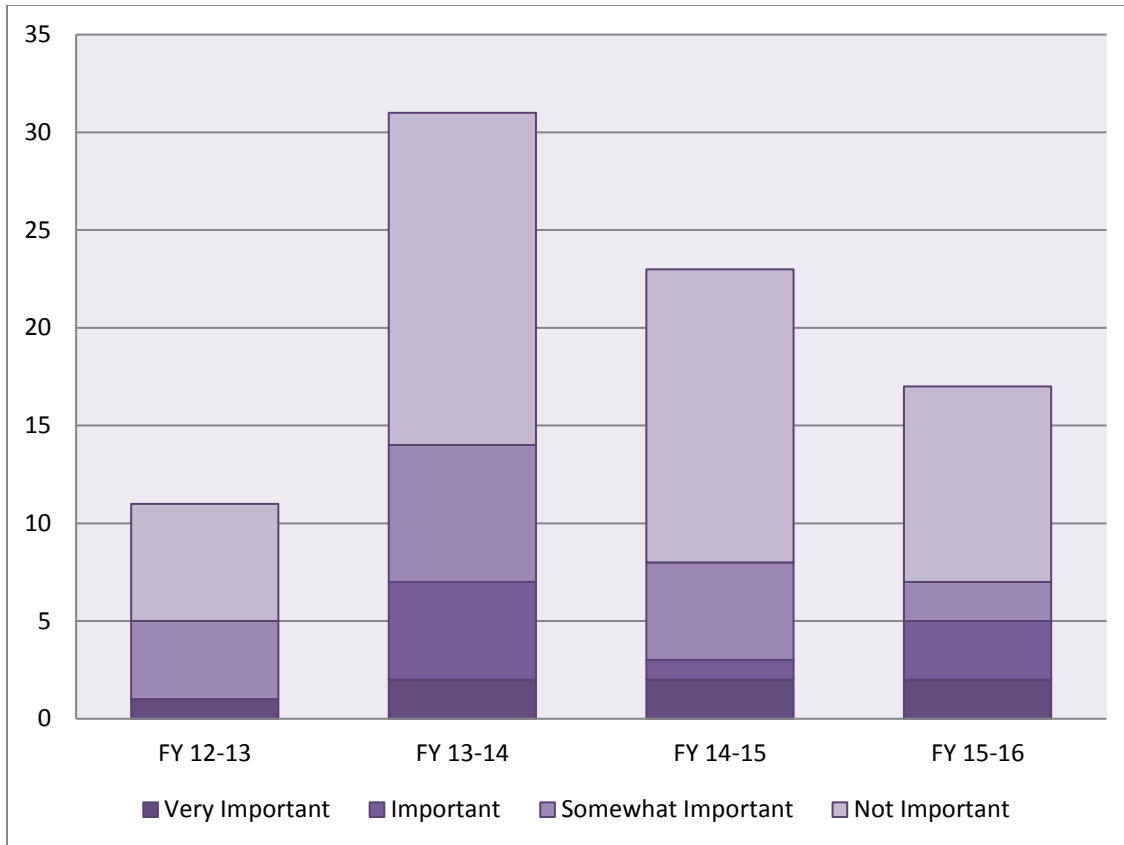


Figure 6. Importance of ERH in Commute Mode Choice

n = 89*

* = Participants who indicated no prior sustainable commute mode (FY 2012-16)

If ERH were unavailable, almost all participants cited that they would continue using sustainable commute modes to get to work. Figure 7 shows that during FY 2015-16, 72 percent of participants would continue commuting to work sustainably at the same frequency while 23 percent of participants would continue using their commute mode less frequently. Only five percent of the participants over the span of this program have said that they would discontinue using sustainable modes for their commute if this program was unavailable. This implies that the program generates behavior change towards using more sustainable commute modes, which would continue even if the financial incentive was removed.

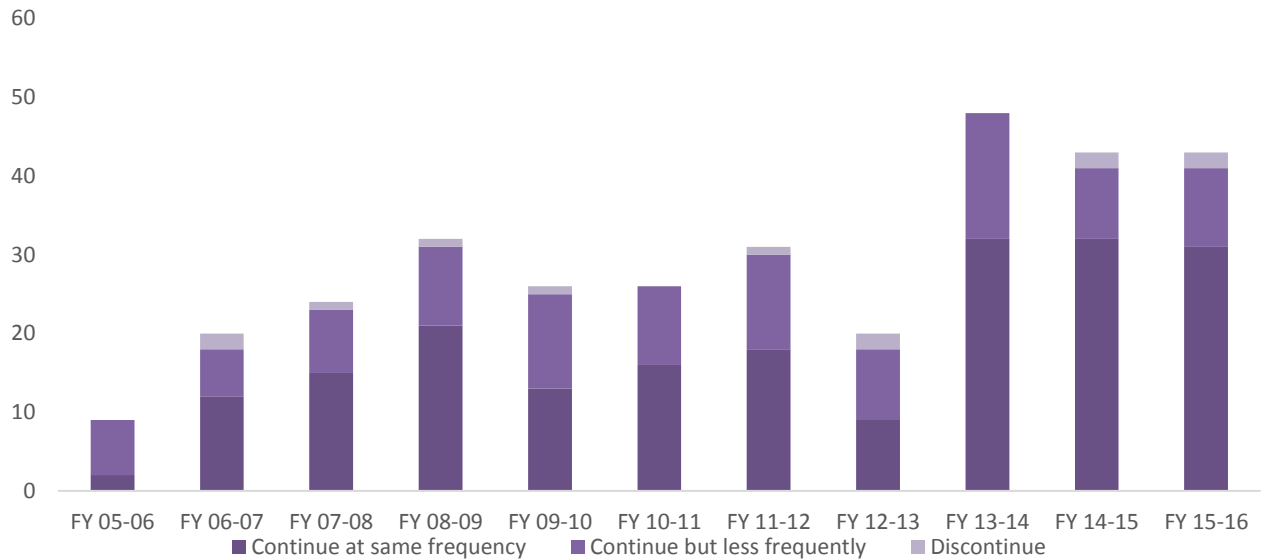


Figure 7. Continuation of Sustainable Commute if ERH Became Unavailable

n = 279

Emergency Ride Home trips must originate from the employee’s work location in San Francisco. Figure 8 shows the zip code starting location of participants for all years since the program has been in place. Most ERH trips originate in downtown San Francisco, the Financial District, or the South of Market (SoMa) neighborhood. Other regions where trips occurred include the Marina, Chinatown, Potrero Hill, and the Mission.

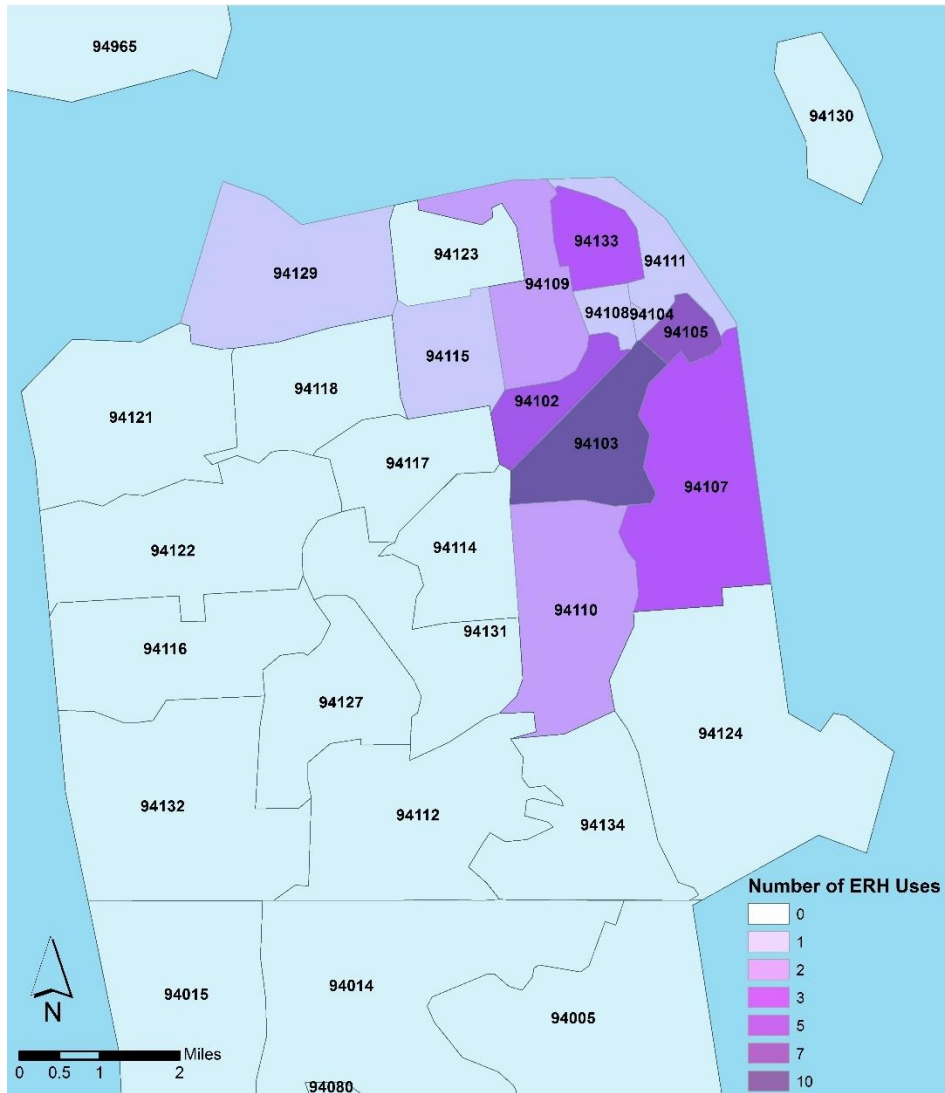


Figure 8. Reimbursements by Zip Code of Workplace Origin for FY 2015-2016

n = 43

ERH trip destinations span across the San Francisco Bay Area. Most of the destinations are located within San Francisco, as seen in Figure 9. Other ERH destinations include the East Bay and the Peninsula. The average distance of each trip has increased in the 15-16 FY by over 1.5 miles, contributing to increased average reimbursement.

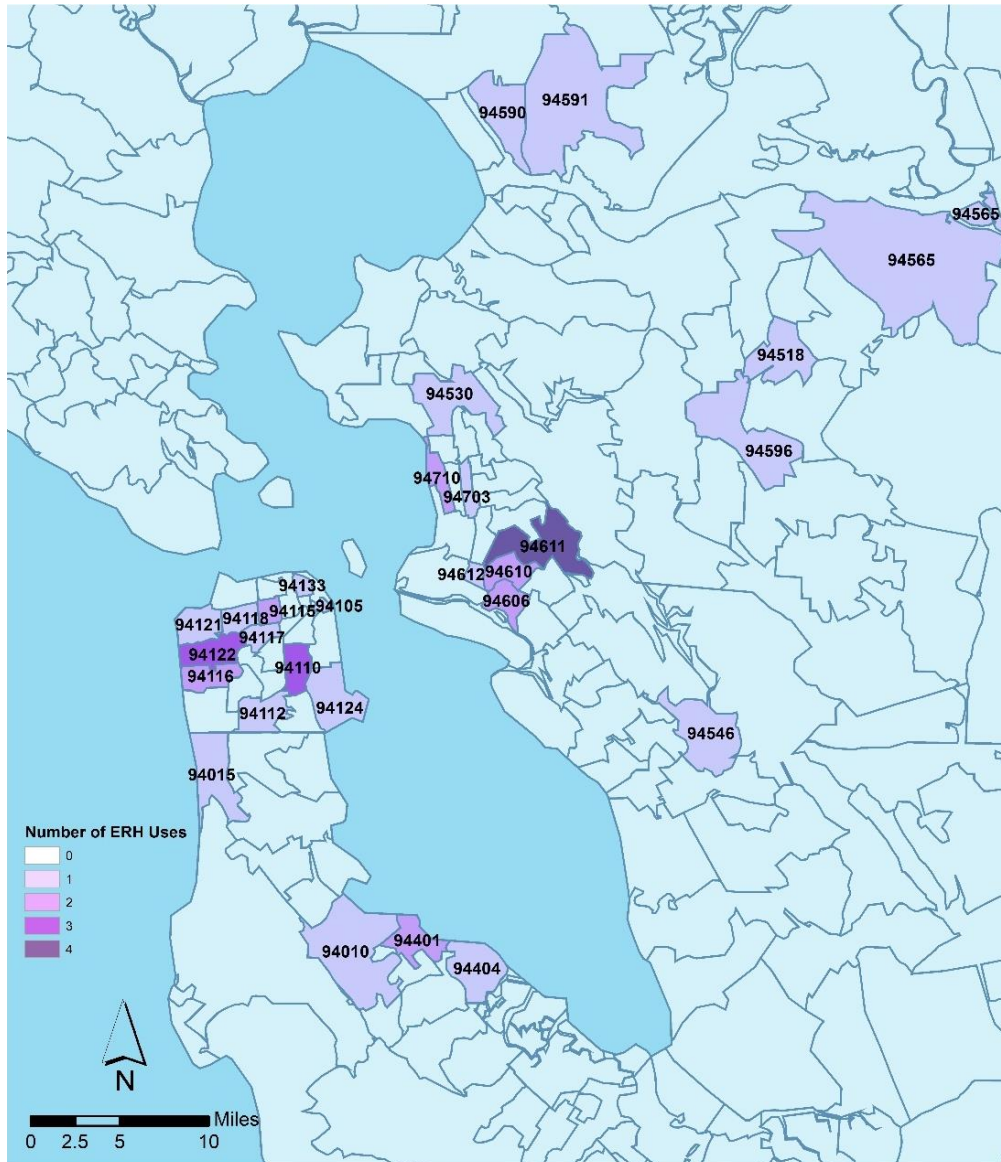


Figure 9. Reimbursements by Zip Code of Destinations for FY 2015-2016

n = 43

As seen in Figure 10, during FY 2015-2016, about 40 percent of participants who utilized the ERH program lived or traveled to an emergency location within ten miles of their workplace. 49 percent live between ten to twenty-five miles and 12 percent live more than twenty-five miles away from their workplace. That group of participants with the furthest destinations increased over 7% from the previous year, likely contributing to a higher cost per ride taken this fiscal year.

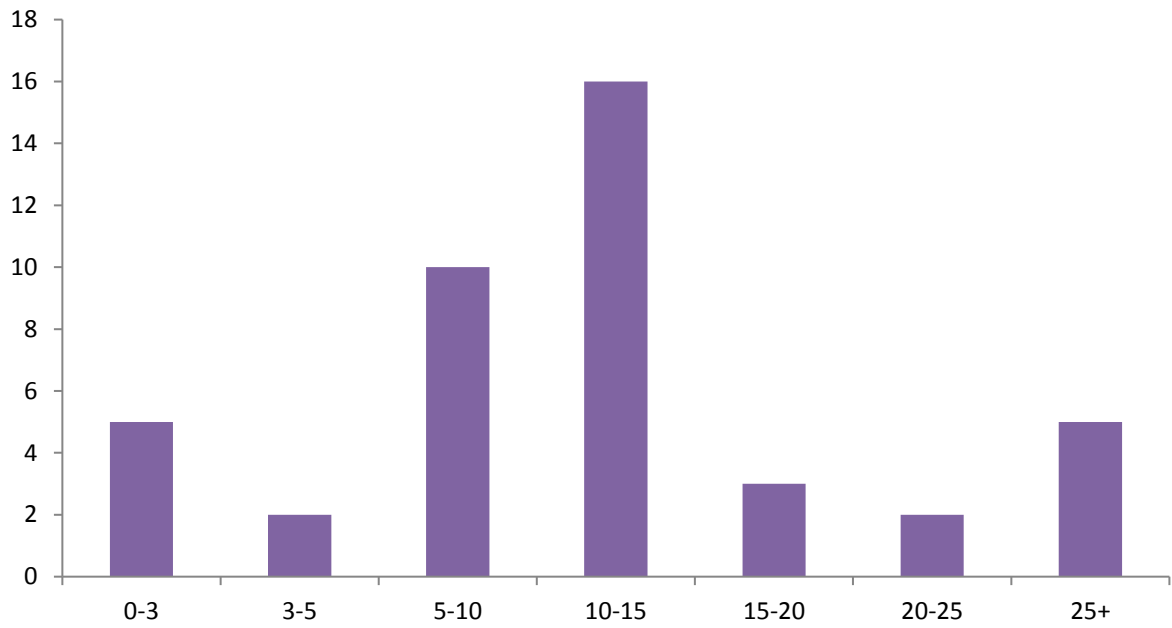


Figure 10. Distance (in miles) traveled using ERH 2015-2016 Fiscal Year

n = 43

4. CONCLUSIONS FROM FY 2015-16

The Emergency Ride Home program has proven to be a reliable and useful program for many participants. Analysis of the Emergency Ride Home program for the 2015-16 fiscal year identified several positive conclusions:

1. **Cost-effective program.** In each year since its inception, the ERH program has met the needs of participants while maintaining a low overall cost. In the past fiscal year, the quantity and dollar amount of reimbursements was slightly higher than each of the past three years, but still well within the usual range.
2. **Infrequent use by many participants.** From FY 2005-06 to FY 2015-16, about 76 percent of commuters that utilized this program have only used it once in a fiscal year. In the past fiscal year alone, 95 percent of participants used the program once. This highlights the likelihood that ERH is only used when necessary.
3. **Encourages commuters to use sustainable modes of transportation.** Over 46% of participants in FY 2015-2016 said they did not use sustainable public transportation prior to learning about and utilizing ERH. This indicates a large opportunity to facilitate behavior change because ERH's safety net encourages participants to use public transportation.
4. **Increases confidence in sustainable transportation.** Most participants indicated the intention to continue to use public transportation even if the ERH program no longer existed. ERH helps commuters become more accustomed to using sustainable modes of transportation, so they then feel more comfortable continuing to use them into the future.

Along with the successes of the program, we did identify areas for improvement. Employee participation in the program is low, indicating the opportunity to reach more commuters by increasing outreach. As seen through the success of the program, with more awareness of ERH comes more sustainable transportation choices from its participants. Consequently, increased outreach to employees could even further bolster San Francisco's Transit First Policy.

APPENDIX A: REIMBURSEMENT REQUEST FORM

SF Emergency Ride Home Reimbursement Request Form

Please complete this form and attach original receipts.
Must be received within 30 days from date of trip and by June 30th of the current fiscal year.

Company Name: _____

Supervisor Name: _____

Supervisor Phone: _____ Supervisor Email: _____

Employee Name: _____ Last 4 Digits of SSN: _____

Employee Phone: _____ Employee Email: _____

Employee Mailing Address:
(for reimbursement check) _____

Date of Ride: _____

Reason for Emergency Ride Home:

- Personal Illness/Crisis
- Family Member Illness/Crisis
- Unscheduled Overtime
- Carpool/Vanpool Problem
- Bicycle Problem
- Other (explain): _____

Starting/Pick-Up Address: _____

Destination/Drop-Off Address: _____

Did the trip include going to any locations other than home? Yes No

If Yes, where? _____

Approximate Distance Traveled (in miles): _____

Type of ERH Ride Taken and Cost to be Reimbursed (attach receipts):

- Taxi (meter fare only; tip not included) \$ _____
- Transit (indicate service used) \$ _____

TOTAL COST \$

How did you, the employee, get to work on the day ERH was used (check all that apply)?

- BART
- Caltrain
- Bus
- Ferry
- Carpool
- Vanpool
- Bicycle
- Walk

Employee Signature

Mail Original Form & Receipt(s) To:
San Francisco Department of the Environment
Emergency Ride Home Program
1455 Market St., Suite 1200, San Francisco, CA 94102

APPENDIX B: REIMBURSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Emergency Ride Home Reimbursement Questionnaire

To be completed by employee following a ride.

1. What is your typical mode of transportation to work (choose one)?
 - Walk
 - Bike
 - Take transit
 - Carpool
 - Vanpool
 - Drive alone
2. How long have you been using your commute mode to travel to work?
 - Less than 6 months
 - 6 months to 1 year
 - 1 to 2 years
 - More than 2 years
3. About how often do you use your typical commute mode to get to work?
 - 5 or more days a week
 - 4 days a week
 - 3 days a week
 - 2 days a week
 - 1 day a week
 - Less than 1 day a week
4. Did you use an alternative mode for your commute to work PRIOR to your employer joining the San Francisco Emergency Ride Home Program?
 - Yes (skip question 5)
 - No
5. If No, how important was the Emergency Ride Home Program in your decision to BEGIN using your commute mode?
 - Very Important (It was the main reason for my switch)
 - Important (It was an important part of my decision)
 - Somewhat Important (It had some influence)
 - Not Important (I began using alternative modes for other reasons)
6. Does having an emergency ride home available when you need it encourage you to use your commute mode MORE OFTEN than you would otherwise?
 - Yes
 - No (skip question 7)
 - Already use alternative mode for all of my commute trips (Alternative mode is anything other than driving alone)
7. If Yes, how much more often? (Answer in days per week)
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - 6
 - 7
8. If the Emergency Ride Home Program were not available, would you... (choose one)
 - Discontinue using your typical commute mode and go back to driving alone
 - Continue using your commute mode, but less frequently than before
 - Continue using your commute mode at the same frequency as before
9. What is your home zip code? _____

APPENDIX C: SUPERVISOR APPROVAL FORM



San Francisco Emergency Ride Home Program Receipts and Supervisor Approval Form

NEW! Receipts now accepted online
Attach your receipts to this form, add your supervisor's signature then
scan and upload to the online Reimbursement Request form at www.sferh.org

or mail them to San Francisco Emergency Ride Home Program, 1455 Market Street Ste. 200, San Francisco CA 94103

Your: **1)** online request form, **2)** receipt(s) and **3)** supervisor approval must be received within 30 days from date of trip, and by June 30 of the current fiscal year. Your reimbursement will not be processed if we do not receive all three items within the specified time period.

Company/Department:	
Employee Name:	Date of Ride:

Please tape your original receipt(s) in the space below, or attach as separate pages:

Supervisor Approval

By signing below, you acknowledge that you are aware and approve of your employee's Emergency Ride Home request.

Supervisor Name:	
Supervisor Phone #:	Supervisor E-mail:
Supervisor Signature:	

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APPENDIX D: PROGRAM RULES

When San Francisco commuters use a sustainable mode to travel to work and experience a personal or family emergency while at work, CommuteSmart will reimburse the cost of the ride (up to \$150 per ride). Emergency Ride Home is free to employees.

No registration needed: you are automatically registered at the time of your first reimbursement request.

What qualifies as an emergency?

Individuals who work in San Francisco may request reimbursement for the following qualified events:

- **Illness or crisis** of employee or immediate family member
- **Carpool or vanpool ride is unavailable** due to unexpected changes in the driver's schedule or vehicle breakdown
- **Bicycle problem**, including flat tire, mechanical failure, vandalism or theft
- **Required unexpected overtime** (i.e. employee was not aware of the situation before the start of the workday). Supervisor authorization is required, and the trip must take place after 10 p.m.

Who is eligible to participate?

All permanent 18 & over part-time or full-time employees of a San Francisco employer are eligible to participate.

Trip Restrictions

All Emergency Ride Home trips must originate at the employee's work location in San Francisco. The employee can be dropped off at home, a transit stop or the location of their parked car (e.g. park-and-ride lot, carpool partner's home, etc.).

Emergency-related side trips on the way home are permitted, including picking up a sick child at school or daycare, filling a prescription at a pharmacy, or stopping at an ATM for cash to pay the taxi driver.

Non-Reimbursable Trips

- Personal errands or pre-planned medical appointments
- Medical emergencies (i.e. when an ambulance is needed)
- Business-related travel
- Overtime that was planned or known prior to the start of a workday, or that was not authorized by a supervisor
- Natural disasters or civic emergencies (e.g. earthquake, demonstration, etc.)
- Transit service breakdown or interruption in service
- Transportation to a doctor or hospital resulting from an on-the-job injury (Emergency Ride Home cannot be used to replace an employer's legal responsibility under workers' compensation regulations)
- Non-emergency related side-trips on the way home
- Trips before 10pm by regular transit riders who have unscheduled overtime